

Book Review: Dear Dad By Ky-Mani Marley



Ky-Mani Marley's starring role in 2002's "Shottas" seemed like an unbelievable story of glorified gangsterism and cartoonish urban masculinity. As a son of the biggest reggae artist in the world who became famous for his ideals about humanity, it would seem impossible that he would know anything about economic struggles, street violence and clan conflict. His memoir *Dear Dad* uncovers a background that honestly bred the film from circumstances marked by privation that followed him from Jamaica to Miami. Ky-Mani's childhood was a fatherless trip that did not entitle him to the same kinds of provisions his siblings had until he became of age. The senior Marley's extramarital affair with Jamaican table tennis champion Anita Belnavis was subjugated by the responsibilities of stardom, a wife and other women. Ky-Mani's fleeting contact with his father ended completely when the elder musician passed from cancer in 1981. The complex politics of blended families is evident when Ky-Mani is unable to attend his father's funeral but sees his brothers Stephen and David dancing onstage at the ceremony. Material security lacked but he found the closeness with his mother's side of the family to be priceless. Bitterness evaded him and his mother because survival was always a critical anxiety.

Their journey from a two-room shack in Jamaica to a Miami ghetto is his introduction to crime, violence and thuglife. An uncle is a weed dealer who creates a scenario for Ky-Mani to manage the business and eventually sell his own product. Belnavis is a drug mule briefly who consults her son about her transactions and teaches him to use a gun. Interludes with his father's family at the mansion with his siblings were short surreal visits that increased his awareness of just how bumpy

life was at his permanent home. The chiding he received from schoolmates who learned of his situation exacerbated the already existing tension created from being a marginally recognized lovechild of a reggae superstar. Marley's sixth son eventually takes advantage of his father's DNA and becomes an artist. Music would start a course of rejuvenation regarding his feelings for his paternal family and give him new ground to bond with his brothers. The redemption his father sang about becomes his own when he accepts the brittleness of human nature with a compassion learned from his realization of the beauty in his struggle. *Dear Dad's* personal journal style and confessional tone implies a therapeutic exercise and an unintentional message of inspiration from the son of one of the world's biggest musical ambassadors.

Book Review: How To Rap: The Art And Science Of The Hip-Hop MC By Paul Edwards



How To Rap: The Art And Science Of The Hip-Hop MC is a book of anecdotes from a wide survey of rappers who explain their praxis to author Paul Edwards. The book writes itself in the words of each rapper's personal prose on the approach to content, flow, the creative process and 11 other mercury-ruled tasks. Edwards is keen to let the artists tell their stories because in hip-hop it is the compelling personalities that always take precedence over the actual work. However, the detailed breakdown of the MC process elucidates not only the

work of the rapper but a sociological truth about the way rap is still seen as “emotional” “primal” music. Twenty something odd years of scholarship on hip-hop has mostly consisted of volumes on the socio-political forces behind rap because even after the billions it has earned, justification for its existence is still the dominant dialogue. Yet those histories of displaced kids like Basquiat and Kurtis Blow finding their voice among the detritus are highly significant to remember in the context of ubiquitous corporate rap that obscures the ethos of the art.

[youtube]B5egwRoiFe4[/youtube]

When the commercial success of subpar rappers completely submerges those artful firepitters who are motivated by more than money distortion settles into the discourse. Writers spurred by the need to properly contextualize hip-hop usually become so immersed in the task of rap’s origins that too often the serious labor utilized to make hip-hop is obscured. The kinds of literature dedicated to uncovering the production of jazz, R&B and even rock music is still not afforded to the mental diligence of the rapper. Edwards’s book does uncover the toil of the emcee but without critiquing the culture or at least one quote from KRS One, *How To Rap* does more harm than good. Chuck D’s compressed quote on his inspiration from the Bronx that started his passion for hip-hop creates an appetite for more details. Q-Tip’s philosophy on the creation of his music seems rushed and sterile.

[youtube]m4nF5-JkBb8[/youtube]

It is the balance between the technical aspect of the work and world it comes from that would make *How To Rap* an ideal read. KRS One’s *Hip-Hop Bible*, which is a continual proclamation about hip-hop’s cultural origins and commitment, makes a book like Edwards’s incomplete. At no time does Edwards offer any insight into the heartbeat of rap or even give descriptions of each rapper’s role in hip-hop except for the

Wikipedia styled biographies at the back of the book. Kool G Rap's page and half foreword offers the richest writing because he tells his story. Those days he spent in the park listening to Melle Mel and others sparked his passion for storytelling and those communal experiences cannot ever be undervalued because that is why hip-hop exists. In spite of a long list of 200 quoted wordsmiths *How To Rap* is a bland uninformed read steered by a tone of glib cultural greenhornism.

Book Review: Hiding In Hip Hop by Terrance Dean



Twenty-six years of gangsta rap promoting alpha males from the street meant everything about him and around him was hard, straight and untainted by the feyness of homosexuality, the scourge of hip-hop. Misogyny did not transfer to an intimate love of one's brother and homophobia kept fake gay male hip-hop wannabes from attempting to pollute the culture. [Terrence Dean's](#) decade-plus career in the entertainment world in various positions with MTV, CNN and a down low network of gay and bisexual men promises to break the calcified image with clueful confessions. The general deception and debauchery of the industry allowed him to present a sexually non-descript exterior by day but accept numerous invitations to down low sex parties from all sorts of men after work. Executives, artists, songwriters and everyday masculine-looking men tryst with him and they all form a chorus with the same words of "sex is great but our secret society must exist to protect our careers and public image." After so many years of this scenario and a discontented relationship with his Detroit-based family Dean decides to withdraw from the lifestyle for a while to do some self-discovery and he starts a men's support group. His leadership of the organization Men Empowerment, Inc. lifts his esteem and lands him speaking engagements among hip-hop's powerful but invisible

brokers. Readers will ponder the names of people that Dean describes and sometimes his hints are obvious blog fodder but tips for names that would heat the book up are too general to peg any one person.

Dean locates the origin of the lifestyle to Black communal condemnation of homosexuality starting with the church. But men secretly sleeping with men has gone on since the 17th century and was never relegated to any specific group of men, in fact before Christianity there was no homophobia. The success of the first Black groupie tell-all by Karrine Steffans underscored the rock star status of the men she wrote about and made the public want to know more even while they dissed her. Anticipation around Dean's title initially caused the same interest but his presence is stronger when he writes about his family relationships. The processes he undergoes in surviving the loss of two brothers and his mother to A.I.D.S., never knowing his dad, having his siblings moved around yet finding comfort in the hands of his grandmother are engrossing and therapeutic. However the lack of a discussion about hip-hop music, its homosocial intersections with homosexuality and the naming of the actual hip-hoppers he bedded does not expose a concealed down low world in hip-hop but keeps it in hiding.

Book Review: Total Chaos



Hip-Hop's transformation from an organic folk culture bred in the Bronx with roots in Afro-diasporic cultural practices into a commercially-successful zeitgeist of cool has put a lot of the artform's core values at stake. After 30 years of popping, scratching, emceeing, tagging, Phat Farm, Def Jam, BET and The Source questions of hip-hop's death, authenticity and its ability to empower

future hip-hop heads are some of the concerns addressed in *Total Chaos*. Veteran hip-hop journalist Jeff Chang who's *Cant Stop Wont Stop* history of hip-hop earned him the Deems Taylor award last year assembled various practitioners to tease out these arguments about the past/present/future of hip-hop. Understanding the cultural rhythm of hip-hop by dissecting its creed seems to be the adventure of hip-hoppers 30 and over. The fans who lack the intimate knowledge of the Golden Era and before don't gripe as much about the various turns corporate politics has created in the mainstream distributions of the music. Some argue that times have changed and the old guards of the art need to accept the new voices and their values which reflect contemporary times. Nas's declaration that hip-hop is dead has stirred this conversation both ways and it situates the concerns of Chang's book which hopes to dismantle hip-hop's canon from the inside. Chang's interview with Tim'm West and Juba Kalamka tramples the official idea that hip-hop is heterosexual art. The two founders of the Bay Area homohop group Deep DickCollective address the invisible queer history of hip-hop by their presence and discussion of downlow boys in the cipher and gay visual pioneers Keith Haring and Jean Michael Basquiat. Long before the praises of hypermasculinity hip-hop heads and house music lovers shared the same dance floor but openly gay emcees are still new to the mainstream. You can "hear" the chip on their shoulders obviously coming from the irony that hip-hop was a response from the powerless to take power and by the early '90s the artform was mimicking its original oppressor.

Accomplished graffiti writers Cey Adams and Brent Rollins argue that the same big company attitude that has enveloped hip-hop has caused its commercial art direction to suffer as well. From spray-painting trains to pen and pixel images and the popularity of professional photo-editing software Photoshop, hip-hop's visuals have been cheapened. Snoop's *Doggystyle* is cited as the best example of poor illustration thanks to nepotism (his cousin did it) and Public Enemy's *Fear Of A Black Planet*'s superior visuals and sales captured the awe of record companies, fans and fellow artists. As much as the computer is derided for making lesser quality optical outings cheesiness has always had its place in hip-hop one specific example being the Jazzy Jeff and Fresh Prince second album cover. The usual issue of misogyny in gangsta rap is

traced to its roots in American stereotypes about Black women by Joan Morgan and Mark Anthony Neal. They compare notes from racist ideologies of the red-hot mamas to the words and actions of male rappers and journalists. Morgan's previously unknown admission that Mike Tyson's rape trial was handled by tax lawyers who cast him as a small-brained big phallus-carrying animal explains why hip-hoppers of both genders need to leave the hypermasculinity and hoedom alone. By the end of the book Chang successfully travels over several mini histories of hip-hop that answers Nas's decalaration with proof of hip-hop's life in crisis not death. KRS-One said that Nas's stance was more of a warning than a definitive casket-closing. These essays within the anthology stake out problem areas in the music and culture that can be healed and force hip-hop to turn on its head and reclaim its insurgent but fun spirit.